

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SECOND  
JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR  
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA  
GRAND JURY, SPRING TERM, 1995**

**Case ST 96-9**

**IN RE: Tallahassee Police Department Shooting Death  
of George Williams, Jr. on September 27, 1996**

**PRESENTMENT**

**IN THE NAME OF AND BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA:**

**THIS CAUSE came before the grand jury to review the facts and circumstances of the death of nineteen year old George "Nuke" Williams, Jr. who was shot by City of Tallahassee Police Officer Lawrence Revell the night of September 27, 1996, while officers were trying to serve six arrest warrants and take him to jail to be held without bond for charges of failure to appear on a pending county court case, violation of probation on three felony drug convictions in circuit court, and more recent forcible felonies of aggravated battery and armed robbery in which the victim was pursued and shot with a firearm.**

**Having heard the sworn testimony of the material eye-witnesses including 14 or more citizens who were present with Williams or in the immediate vicinity that evening, Officer Lawrence Revell, the three other officers involved in the arrest efforts, officers participating in the shooting investigation, Tallahassee Police Chief Tom Coe, a firearms examiner from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Crime Laboratory, the mother of the deceased, and having reviewed prior statements made to police and state attorney staff by other citizen witnesses who did not appear before this grand jury, we find this homicide was a necessary, lawful, and justifiable use of deadly force.**

DAVE L. A. LEE  
CLERK CIRCUIT COURT  
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA

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## FACTUAL FINDINGS

Chief Tom Coe and various other officers on several occasions preceding the fatal shooting had spoken with Connie Love, mother of George Williams, Jr., and urged her to have her son turn himself in. Officers had information that "Nuke" often socialized near apartment 150 at 1700 Joe Louis Street and they had been in the area many times before looking for him to arrest him on the outstanding warrants, which are orders of the court to take a person into custody after a judge has found probable cause of a criminal violation. Some witnesses had noticed the officers gathering at a nearby store and had returned to the Joe Louis Street project area and alerted Nuke and his associates. One young man near the driveway into the projects was apparently acting as a lookout and yelled "nine," the street code meaning police, as Sgt. Taltha White and Officers David Odom and Lawrence Revell entered the housing project in an unmarked Jeep vehicle driven by Officer Chuck Perry. Even then a friend of Williams urged him not to run and to turn himself in to the officers. All witnesses say they knew the vehicle belonged to the police as they had seen it and similar vehicles on other occasions. One called it the "jump out" truck as she knew officers would jump out and try to catch drug dealers or others wanted for criminal offenses or warrants.

"Nuke" entered a four speed, front wheel drive Suzuki car, reported by the owner as stolen several hours later, and ignored commands of Officer Perry to stop the vehicle. The defendant backed up swerving at an excessive rate of speed, apparently flooring the accelerator, causing Officer Perry to jump to safety and the vehicle impacted into Officer David Odom throwing him onto the trunk and causing his head and shoulder to break through the back window. Some witnesses say the officer apparently wanted to get hit, or that "Nuke" didn't see him and the officer was just in the only way he could drive to try to get away. As the car traveled across the street Officer Odom was ejected onto the ground leaving him injured and semi-conscious as the car's rear wheels went over the curb onto a grassy area. The impact caused Williams to bounce in his seat and his hands came up briefly, then returned to the steering wheel and the gear shift lever on the floor. The front tires of this front wheel drive vehicle remained on the pavement. Officer Perry ran to the Jeep to try to block or pursue the Suzuki as Officer Revell and Sgt. White ran towards the

Suzuki ordering "Nuke" to freeze, to not move, or they would shoot. Officer Odom stood up and drew his gun from the passenger side. Many citizen witnesses thought the Suzuki was stuck on the curb. Most say "Nuke" looked like he had one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the gear shift lever while revving the engine and grinding the gears trying to get the car to go forward to escape. From the passenger side Sgt. White and Officer Odom saw "Nuke's" right hand working the gear shift lever with his left hand on the steering wheel racing the engine and turning his head downward as though looking to get it in a gear. Officer Revell from the front looked directly at "Nuke" who was looking back at him as he shouted "Freeze or I'll shoot" when he saw motion of his right arm consistent with working the shift lever. Some citizens say they thought "Nuke" was intending to run over the officer standing in front of the car, who one witness described as acting like he was Superman. This was Officer Revell who fired one shot striking "Nuke" in the upper forehead as "Nuke" looked directly at the officer, lowered his head, and revved the engine. Fearing the car would still lunge forward and strike Officer Revell or run amok through the large crowd Officer Odom despite his pain and some disorientation opened the passenger door, reached across, and turned off the ignition, then slumped back down on the ground in pain and shock. Rather than firing another shot which would be acceptable standard law enforcement training and procedure, Officer Revell sensed that his one shot had stopped the defendant and ran to aid Officer David Odom who was down on the ground and believed dead or seriously injured. Officer Perry ran from his Jeep towards the Suzuki as Officer Revell yelled to Officer Perry to "cover him," meaning to keep guard on "Nuke" in case he was not disabled and still posed a threat, and Perry shouted back "I've got him, I've got him" as he was now pointing his firearm at George Williams, Jr. Sgt. White immediately checked George Williams, Jr. for vital signs. It was possibly less than ten seconds from the time officers drove up until the one shot was fired, and in the excitement and confusion about nine citizens claim either that Officer Perry fired the shot, they assumed it was Perry, or they heard it was Perry, and some don't know who fired. One very thorough witness candidly admitted that in his interview and written statement several hours after the incident he was sure the shooter was Officer Perry; however, after later seeing photographs of the officers he is now positive it was Officer

Revell. Others say it was definitely Officer Lawrence Revell, and the consistent statements of all officers as well as examinations of firearms and ammunition by other officers and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Crime Laboratory conclusively show that Officer Revell's pistol fired the bullet removed from the deceased, Officer Revell's pistol ejected the only empty cartridge casing found, and the guns of the other officers did not appear to have been fired and all ammunition was present.

Sgt. White radioed for two ambulances to come "10-18" (lights and sirens) and Sgt. David Hendry, an officer with emergency medical training, also checked on George Williams, Jr., who was not moving and his injury appeared mortal. Both ambulances and paramedics arrived about nine minutes later. Witnesses say it was 40 minutes or longer, and an officer tending to the injured Officer Odom said it seemed like forever due to the circumstances, but realizes it was only a matter of minutes. Despite CPR efforts by emergency medical staff assisted by a police officer while enroute to Tallahassee Memorial Regional Medial Center, Williams was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital. Officer David Odom was treated for scratches, abrasions, bruises, a laceration to his leg requiring ten stitches where the Suzuki bumper struck him, and his flashlight, key ring, gunbelt, and pistol were damaged by the collision. A paper bag with multiple smaller baggies of marijuana was found beside "Nuke" between the driver's seat and the door, which is a common way drug dealers carry their drugs to avoid customers from reaching in and stealing their inventory. His autopsy revealed the single gunshot was the cause of his death and there was both cocaine and marijuana in his system.

Examination of the Suzuki by an expert police traffic investigator and the wrecker driver show that the vehicle frame had struck and scraped the curb on impact but was not stuck as witnesses assumed. The front tires of this front wheel drive vehicle were on the pavement and bearing weight. The transmission would not shift from neutral into a forward gear when the engine was "revving" and witnesses describe hearing the gears "grinding" as Williams was apparently trying to make the car go forward.

The officers attempting the arrest were aware of the defendant's history of violence, his likelihood of having a firearm, and his prior resisting and fleeing to avoid arrest. Law

enforcement officers are trained to shoot only when absolutely necessary to stop the aggressive person. Firing warning shots or shooting at the tires is not a safe or proper law enforcement procedure as it is generally ineffective and puts innocent persons at risk of injury from projectiles or from the fleeing felon who is more likely to get away.

#### APPLICABLE FLORIDA STATUTES

Section 776.012, Florida Statutes, states a person is justified in the use of deadly force only if he reasonably believes that such force is necessary to prevent imminent death or great bodily harm to himself or another or to prevent the imminent commission of a "forcible felony" defined as including aggravated assault, aggravated battery, armed robbery, murder, or any other felony involving the use or threat of physical force or violence. In deciding whether a person was justified in the use of deadly force, we must judge that person by the circumstances by which he was surrounded at the time the force was used. To justify the use of force likely to cause death or great bodily harm, the appearance of danger must have been so real that a reasonably cautious and prudent person under the same circumstances would have believed that the danger could be avoided only through the use of that force.

Generally there is a duty to retreat before resorting to deadly force, unless you are in your dwelling or it reasonably appears that by retreating your personal danger would greatly increase. Police officers do not have a duty to retreat. They have a duty to enforce the laws including serving arrest warrants which are court orders signed by a judge. Section 776.05, Florida Statutes, states a law enforcement officer need not retreat or desist from efforts to make a lawful arrest because of resistance or threatened resistance to the arrest. He is justified in the use of any force (1) which he reasonably believes to be necessary to defend himself or another from bodily harm while making the arrest, and (2) when necessarily committed in arresting a felon fleeing from justice, especially when the use of deadly force was necessary to prevent the arrest from being defeated by such flight, some warnings had been given, and (a) the officer reasonably believed that the fleeing felon posed a threat of death or serious physical harm to the officer or others, or (b) the officer reasonably believed that the fleeing felon had committed a crime involving the infliction or threatened infliction of serious physical harm to another person. The law also states that

a defendant is not justified in using force to resist an arrest by a law enforcement officer who is known, or reasonably appears to be a law enforcement officer. There is no doubt that George Williams, Jr. knew these were police officers attempting to arrest him.

**CONCLUSION**

All of the above statutory conditions existed when George Williams, Jr. resisted arrest, backed his vehicle at high speed striking and injuring Officer David Odom, and appeared to be trying to put the vehicle into a forward gear with the engine "revving" as Officer Lawrence Revell, reasonably believing Officer Odom to be dead or seriously injured, stood in front of the vehicle with his firearm aimed at "Nuke" and ordered him not to move. The criminal actions of George Williams, Jr. by resisting officers with violence was a "forcible felony" as defined in Section 776.08, Florida Statutes, as his conduct involved the use or threat of physical force or violence against another individual.

George Williams, Jr. forced Officer Lawrence Revell to make a split second choice between shooting to stop him or by trying to jump aside risking death or great bodily harm to himself or others and letting "Nuke" escape. The officer bravely performed his sworn duties in a professional manner consistent with his training and experience. A civilized society must always retain the ability to enforce the criminal laws and not allow violent felony offenders to avoid arrest and incarceration.

**THEREFORE** we find this homicide is clearly within the provisions of Florida Statutes defining justifiable use of deadly force.

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED** this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of October, 1996.

[Redacted Signature]

Foreman

Attest [Redacted Signature]